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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000544

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: WITH WELCH, MARCH 14 REPORTS ON EFFORTS
TO UNIFY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) March 14 Secretary General Fares Suaid hosted an April 17 luncheon for visiting NEA A/S Welch, attended by a strong showing of March 14 representatives. Welch assured the participants that the U.S. supports the immediate election of a president. There was consensus among all of the participants that a president must be elected without further delay, with some voicing their support for a "half plus plus" majority. Suaid informed Welch that the March 14 members were seeking greater coordination as a coalition while preserving individual party differences. Suaid said they were working toward a common platform on key issues such as electoral law.

¶2. (C) Participants noted that March 14's popularity is growing, while there is increasing "malaise" within Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement party. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's advisor suggested that the PM's recent visits to Arab capitals successfully shifted their perception from viewing Lebanon's conflict as internal to seeing Syria as the cause of Lebanon's problems. End summary.

¶3. (C) March 14 Secretary General Fares Suaid hosted a luncheon for visiting NEA A/S Welch on April 17, attended by a strong showing of March 14 representatives. Attendees included: Antoine Haddad and Camille Ziadeh (representing Nassib Lahoud), Eddy Abillama and Georges Adwan (representing Lebanese Forces), Mohammad Chatah (advisor to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora), MP Samir Franjeh, former MP Mansour Bone, Ghattas Khoury and Nader Hariri (advisors to Saad Hariri), Michel Mouawad (representing his mother, Minister Nayla Mouawad), Salim Sayegh (representing Amine Gemayel), Ahmad Safadi (representing MP and Minister of Public Works and Transportation Mohammed Safadi), Sami Nader, Sheikh Michel Khoury, National Bloc leader Carlos Eddy, and Karim Karagulla. Charge, Pol/Econ Chief, Special Assistant, and PolStaff were also present.

INCREASED MARCH 14 COORDINATION

¶4. (C) Suaid informed Welch that the March 14 Secretariat was created because March 14 members were seeking greater coordination as a coalition. Suaid stressed that while they are seeking a common platform on major issues, the various parties within the coalition will maintain their differences. Reaching a common position on a new electoral law is a

priority for March 14, Suaid said.

MARCH 14 STRONGER THAN EVER

15. (C) Michel Mouawad argued that March 14 is in a much better position than it was when Welch visited in December. First, he posited, we have more popular support and have proved that we are the majority, citing March 14 successes in university and professional union elections. Second, the international and Arab communities are more aligned in their support for March 14. Third, he continued, we are better coordinated as a group.

TIME TO ELECT A PRESIDENT

16. (C) Since March 14 is stronger than ever, Mouawad concluded, we must move to elect a president with a "greater than half plus one" majority, if we cannot secure a two-thirds majority. Salim Sayegh, representing Amine Gemayel, also called for electing a president immediately, even if that meant with a half plus one majority. Ahmad Safadi said that everyone now agrees on electing Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman and therefore proceeding with his election is the first step towards resolving Lebanon's problems. Carlos Eddy was the lone voice taking exception to agreement on Sleiman's candidacy. Welch assured the participants that the U.S. supports the immediate election of a president.

17. (C) Admitting that it is not yet clear whether Sleiman would accept a "half plus plus" majority, Mouawad proposed that March 14 build momentum internally and with the

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international community, gain the Patriarch's support, and work to secure as many votes as possible. Once they reach the maximum number of votes they deem possible, Mouawad said, March 14 should then approach Sleiman to see if he will accept, and if so, proceed with the election.

FINANCES ROOT OF DISCONTENT
IN AOUN'S PARTY

18. (C) Carlos Eddy attributed what he called a "malaise" within Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) to the flow of cash to certain members at the exclusion of others. He recommended that the international community regulate FPM's financial transactions.

ARAB WORLD NOW SEES SYRIA
AS THE INSTIGATOR

19. (C) PM Siniora's chief aide Mohammed Chatah suggested that the PM's recent visits to Arab capitals successfully shifted their perception from viewing Lebanon's conflict as an internal dispute between the majority and the opposition, to seeing Syria as the cause of Lebanon's problems. Moreover, Chatah continued, Siniora enlarged the conflict in Arab leaders' minds from a presidential issue to a problem in the Lebanese-Syrian relationship. George Adwan added that parliament Speaker Nabih Berri is attempting to portray the opposite - that the problem is strictly internal. He requested that the U.S., France, and the rest of the international community continue to point to Syria as the instigator.

110. (C) Chatah noted that although the GOL position is close to March 14's thinking, Siniora was conveying the official GOL stance during his visits, as opposed to the position of the March 14 coalition.

MARCH 14 MEMORANDUM

¶11. (C) Suaid gave Welch a March 14 Memorandum outlining March 14's demands to achieve sovereignty and independence. He stressed that resolving the crisis in Lebanon depends on improving Lebanese-Syrian relations. He requested U.S. support in forming an international investigative committee to look into the fate of Lebanese nationals held in Syrian prisons.

¶12. (C) In response to points raised in the document, Welch reported that the administration of the Special Tribunal was being set up and that UNIIIC Commissioner Daniel Bellemare indicated progress in his investigations. Welch also noted that the U.S. was discussing how to further help the LAF and then stated clearly that the U.S. is against "tawteen" (Palestinian resettlement living in Lebanon). Note: A copy of the memorandum has been forwarded to NEA/ELA. End Note.

REQUESTING PRESSURE AGAINST
SYRIA; ECONOMIC SUPPORT

¶13. (C) Several participants suggested that the U.S. and Europe apply more pressure against Syria and continue to name Syria as the source of Lebanon's problems. Mouawad added that Lebanon needs economic support so that economic troubles do not shift support away from the Siniora government.

ALLYING WITH SHIA

¶14. (C) Noting that March 8 is allied with Hizballah, Hamas, Syria, and Iran, MP Samir Franjeh called for an "alliance between the democratic forces in the Arab world and March 14." He also suggested March 14 reach out to the Beirut representative of the Shia religious authority Sayyed al-Sistani.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

¶15. (C) Calling for an international conference on Lebanon to counter Syria, Sami Nader said Lebanon needed to reengage France in a "manageable" way. Regarding the April 22 "Friends of Lebanon" meeting scheduled to take place in

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Kuwait on the margins of an Iraq meeting, Welch said he did not know whether France intended to invite Lebanon. He advised that the Siniora government should decide if it wants to participate and if so, make a formal request to the French Embassy.

MARCH 14'S WORKSHOPS

¶16. (C) Antoine Haddad reported on the workshops the coalition has been sponsoring since its convention on March 14. He said that the focus is on domestic issues, including electoral law, local government, governance and corruption, and administrative reform, with discussion of external issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to come next. Civil society participation is invaluable, noted Haddad, because March 14 wants people to feel they are contributing to the future of an improved Lebanon. He added that they have a three-month deadline (until June 14) to develop a new vision for March 14.

DISAPPROVAL OVER CARTER'S TRIP

¶17. (C) Inquiring about the U.S. position on former President Carter's upcoming meeting with Hamas, Sheikh Michel Khoury expressed his disapproval over talking to Hamas and Hizballah. He said, "Carter's visit is more negative than

Speaker Pelosi's visit to Damascus last year."

¶18. (U) A/S Welch has not had the opportunity to clear this cable.
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